

REMARKS

Claims 2-25, all the claims pending in the application, stand rejected. Applicant has amended claims 2, 4, 7, 17, 18, 23, 24 and 25.

Claim Objections

Claims 2-25 are objected to because the claims interchange the use of the words “player” and “user.” The Examiner notes that the specification states that these two limitations are the same entity. The Examiner advises that for consistency one or the other of the two words should be used. Applicants submit that since the Examiner admits that both words are used in the specification, both are appropriate and the claims should be considered allowable. However, Applicants have amended claims 7, 24 and 25 to change the word “user” to “player.”

Claim 24 is objected to because the word “a” appears to be missing. An appropriate change to the claim has been made.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claims 7-9 and 25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. The Examiner notes that claims 7-9 recite the limitation “each player’s identifier.” The Examiner finds insufficient antecedent basis for this limitation in the claims. Applicant has amended claim 4 to state “each player being assigned a player identifier.”

Claim 25 is rejected because it states “distributing rarity added value information.” The Examiner states that it is unclear as to what the phrase “rarity added value information” concerns and, therefore, considers the claim indefinite. The application references “rarity added value information” at page 25.

Applicants respectfully submit that this phrase relates to a statistical presence of an item, where a low statistical presence would indicate a “rare” occurrence. By the same token, something appearing with a high statistical rate would not be considered “rare.” One of ordinary skill in the art would understand that information relating to such statistical presence may be distributed as a value in accordance with normal game operations. Thus, this basis for rejection is traversed.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 2, 3, 13, 17, 19 and 21-23 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Onda et al (6,746,333) in view of Stamper et al (6,820,265). This rejection is traversed for at least the following reasons.

The Examiner has changed the basis for rejection of these claims, of which claims 2, 17 and 23 are independent. The Examiner now looks to the newly identified reference to Onda for teaching of a game mastery support apparatus (Fig. 1) having distribution device 200 (Figs. 1 and 4) which distributes mastery information, that advises a player how to master a game. The Examiner asserts that the information is distributed to a terminal apparatus 400 having a game execution function for executing the executable game independent of the mastery information, with reference to the teachings in Onda at col. 3, lines 40-60, col. 5, lines 52-65, col. 10, lines 5-21 and col. 13, lines 1-27. The Examiner assert that the distribution device 200 distributes the mastery information according to information obtained from the terminal apparatus 400, with reference to col. 6, lines 36-43.

The Examiner bases the analysis on the system illustrated in Fig. 1 of Onda, which includes an arcade game 100 that is played by a player and an information distribution device 200 that is operative to communicate via the internet 300 with a home computer 400. The distribution device provides “associated data” to the home computer 400 in the form of game specific data 234 that includes secret tricks or hints, as explained at col. 10, lines 5-14. The three embodiments disclosed in the specification are based on a home computer 400 that does not execute a game, but simply receives the associated data for subsequent use in connection with the arcade game 100.

Claim 2

The present invention, as recited in claim 2, requires a terminal apparatus (1) that has a game execution function for executing a multi-stage game, (2) that provides to a distribution device mastery status information that indicates a stage to which the player has proceeded and (3) that receives mastery information from the distribution device. The distribution device distributes the mastery information according to the mastery status information from the terminal apparatus. This relationship is not disclosed in Onda.

As illustrated in Fig. 1 and explained at col. 5, line 50 - col. 6, line 43, a player will operate the arcade game 100 and can obtain access specific data 142, which later may be used for accessing predetermined associated game-specific data 234 (hints or secret items), by satisfying a predetermined game condition. That access specific data 142 is in the form of a password or code for subsequent use on the home computer 400 for obtaining associated data in the nature of the hints or secret tricks 234. The flow of the arcade game in delivering such access specific data 142 is provided at col. 7, line 26 - col. 8, line 48 and is illustrated in Fig. 3.

The game data distribution device 200, as detailed in Figs. 4 and 5, is operative to provide the hints and tricks 234 to a user at a home terminal 400, upon input of the previously obtained code or password 142, as explained at col. 8 line 49 - col. 10, line 37. The distribution device 200 does not distribute mastery information to a terminal apparatus that executes a game nor does it receive from the terminal apparatus information indicating a stage to which a player has proceeded.

The claim clearly requires a direct connection between the terminal that executes the game and the distribution device. In short, the game data distribution device 200 in Onda does not collect information about the player or the players operation of the arcade game. Instead, the Onda distribution device 200 is simply a storage that contains game specific data and delivers such data to any user having a particular password or code. The distribution device does not retain information as to the actual level such individual user has proceeded.

In order to further distinguish the invention, Applicant has amended claim 2 to state that the information relates to an individual player and is based on data concerning an individual player that is accumulated and stored in the distribution device. Such structure is taught in Fig. 14 where a game mastery support device 300 is equipped with game information 341 as well as user information 342 and can access mastery information in a table area 350 on an individual player basis.

Nothing else in Onda indicates any communication of status information from the game machine to the distribution device or suggests that only a single processor, rather than several processors are used. Moreover, there is no teaching or suggestion that individual user data is retained by the distribution device. In short, there is no teaching or suggestion that all of the limitations of current claim 2, as amended, would be met.

At page 6 of the Office Action, the Examiner admits that Onda lacks in specifically disclosing that the game is a multi-stage game and that the distribution condition is a stage among multiple stages to which the player has proceeded. The Examiner looks to Stamper for such teaching. Further, the Examiner points to the disclosure in Stamper at col. 4, lines 49-61 and col. 8, lines 35-57 for teachings that sharing of hints as to how to solve a game may be based on the level to which a player has achieved in the game and that master status information may include flag information.

Applicants respectfully submit that Stamper does not remedy the basic deficiencies in Onda et al, especially as claim 2 is amended. Moreover, Applicants respectfully submit that Stamper's deficiency in using only a single processor is not remedied by Onda, as Onda's combined device as suggested in col. 13 would use only a single processor, since one skilled in the art would use only one processor as taught in Stamper.

Claim 17

Claim 17 relates only to the terminal apparatus that receives game mastery support information and executes a multi-stage game. The apparatus has a display screen and a processing section which receives from a game mastery support apparatus distributed mastery information.

Applicants respectfully submit that the mastery information is not assembled for a player individually, but simply based on an input code that is applicable without regard to player identity. This is supported by an amendment to the claim to state that the mastery information is assembled for a player individually.

Claim 23

Claim 23 defines the invention as a computer readable medium having a processing program comprising a distributing routine for distributing mastery information to a terminal apparatus having a game execution function executable in stages and the mastery information being distributed on a stage-by-stage basis. The function is expressly made executable independent of the mastery information.

Applicants respectfully submit that there is no teaching or suggestion in the prior art that Onda et al should provide hints on the basis of individual player information. According to the

basis teachings in Onda et al, only general hints would be obtained on the basis of a general code, even if the code is issued on a stage by stage basis.

Thus, the claim has been amended to focus on such information being provided for an individual player.

Claims 4-12, 14-16, 18, 20, 24 and 25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Onda et al (6,746,333) in view of Stamper et al (6,820,265) and further in view of Lee (6,475,089). This rejection may be traversed for at least the following reasons.

The rejected claims include independent claims 4, 18 and 24. These claims are patentable for the following reasons

Claim 4.

Claim 4 defines the invention as having a distribution device for distributing mastery information to a terminal apparatus having a game execution function, as well as a ranking information distribution device which distributes ranking information pertaining to a rank of a player in a game. The mastery information is distributed on the basis of the ranking of the player.

Here again, the basic teachings of the three embodiment in Onda concern the distribution of mastery information to a home computer, not a terminal apparatus having a game execution function for executing a multi-stage game. In Onda, the arcade game 100 executes the game while the home computer 400 receives mastery information. The home computer is not a terminal apparatus having a game execution function. Thus, this claim limitation would not be found in Onda alone or in combination with Stamper and Lee.

The limitation from claim 2 has been added to claim 4. Also, the claim has been amended to stress that the information concerning an individual player is retained in the mastery distribution or ranking information distribution devices.

The Examiner admits at page 8 of the Office Action that Onda and Stamper lack in disclosing distributing ranking information. The Examiner looks to Lee for a teaching of a game system in which ranking information distribution device distributes ranking information pertaining to a rank of a player of a game (col. 1, lines 38-41, col. 8, lines 16-44). The Examiner notes that the system will only distribute game and opponent information if the rankings of a

player or opponent are similar. The Examiner points to the teaching in Lee of an accumulator and a determining device that determines the rank of a corresponding user with reference to accumulated information at col. 8, lines 23-44. The Examiner finds it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to distribute the mastery information in Onda on the basis of the ranking of a player.

The amendment to the claims to expressly state that the mastery information is distributed on the basis of information retained individually for each player would distinguish over the combination of art. Applicants respectfully submit that there is no teaching or suggestion in Lee or Stamper for modifying Onda et al to have mastery information kept individually, as recited in the amended claim. Onda et al clearly treats the hints and secrets as generic information that gets distributed on the basis of a code, regardless of the identity of the game player. Applicants respectfully submit that it would involve hindsight to modify Onda et al to provide customized game secrets and hints, as now claimed.

Claim 18

This independent claim is directed to a terminal apparatus having a display screen and processing section that receives game mastery information according to particular stages attained by a player in a multi-stage game, and where the processing section receives distributed ranking information pertaining to the rank of a player in a game.

Applicant has amended the claim to state that mastery information is provided on the basis of an individual player's identity. Applicant submits that the claim requires the mastery information to be provided independent of the mastery information and that, if the teachings of Lee are considered, the information would be provided in connection with the execution of the game. Thus, the Examiner would have to use hindsight to define an apparatus that met the claim limitations.

Claim 24

Claim 24 concerns a method for distributing game mastery information, including the step of storing in a terminal apparatus relevant game and player identification information, as well as a flag for mastery information. The flag is stored in a mastery status management table in a game mastery support apparatus on a per user identifier basis. Onda et al clearly does not teach such storage, as already noted with regard to other claims. There is no teaching or

suggestion in either Onda et al or Stamper et al that mastery information is kept on a per user basis. Lee would not be competent to suggest a modification of Onda et al alone or with Stamper without the use of hindsight. The two approaches (Onda et al is generic to all users while Lee involves rank specific to a user) are opposite and there is no teaching or suggestion to modify Onda et al on the basis of Lee. Applicants submit that the claim as presented is patentable.

Dependent Claims

Applicants submit that the claims that depend from the above independent claims would be patentable for the reasons given above.

Further, with regard to the limitations concerning "rarity added value information" in claim 25, Applicants submit that no such information or concept is taught specifically in any of the references.

Finally, claims 3, 5, 6 and 20 would be allowable for the reasons given for their parent claims, and because Lee does not remedy the deficiencies of the rejection of those parent claims.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

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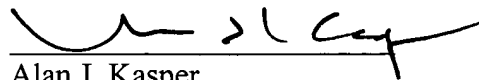
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